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ABSTRACT

Based on "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," this lesson plan presents activities in which students work collaboratively to evaluate four stages in the life of Malcolm X, each corresponding to a different name he used; consider how each name Malcolm X used reflected that period in his life; and draw conclusions in a written essay about how his life experiences shaped him and his legacy. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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ASSIGNMENT DISCOVERY ONLINE CURRICULUM

Title:
What's in a Name? Understanding Malcolm X

Grade Level:
9-12

Subject Area:
Literature, U.S. History

Duration:
Two to three class periods

Objectives:
Students will:

1. Work collaboratively to evaluate four stages in the life of Malcolm X: the periods he was known as Malcolm Little, Detroit Red, Malcolm X, and el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz
2. Consider how each name Malcolm X used reflected that period in his life
3. Draw conclusions in a written essay about how his life experiences shaped Malcolm X and his legacy

Materials

- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
- Books and magazines about Malcolm X and the civil rights movement
- Computer with Internet access
- Classroom Activity Sheet: Character Analysis, Part One
- Take-Home Activity Sheet: Character Analysis, Part Two

Procedures

1. After students have read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, discuss the various names Malcolm X used in his lifetime. On the board, create a list of the names Malcolm X used, along with the period in his life that he used these names. Malcolm X was born in 1925 as Malcolm Little. He was known as Detroit Red in the early 1940s, took the name of Malcolm X in 1952, and finally changed his name to *el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz in 1964*.

2. Ask students why a person would take a name, either legally or casually, other than his or her birth name? What do names tell us about a person? Are there any students in the class who prefer to use a nickname in place of their birth name? Why?

3. Now separate the class into groups of four, assigning each group a name from a period in Malcolm X's life: Malcolm Little, Detroit Red, Malcolm X, el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz. Hand out copies of the Classroom Activity Sheet: Character Analysis to each member of the group. Explain that each group will be analyzing one specific period in the life of Malcolm X—the

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time in which he used the name they have been assigned. Ask each group to focus only on the chapters in the novel *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* that deal with that period of his life.

4. Have group members work together to answer the questions on their activity sheet, including writing a one-to-two-paragraph summary describing what they believe defined Malcolm X's personality during this period in his life. Students should include the following information in their summaries:

    - What events had an impact on Malcolm during this period in his life?
    - What else influenced his life during this time?
    - Did he have any religious beliefs? If so, what were they?
    - Did he have any views on violence? If so, what were they?
    - What were his opinions (if any) on the African American identity or civil rights in the United States?

    For example, if a group focuses on Malcolm Little, group members will need to consider how the following shaped that time in his life: his parents' activism, the burning of his childhood home, the murder of his father, the eventual mental breakdown of his mother, and separation from his brother and sister. If a group focuses on Detroit Red, group members will need to discuss his surroundings, addictions, lifestyle, and eventual arrest. Students should draw conclusions in their summaries as to how these experiences influenced Malcolm's personality and life. Students can continue to work together until the end of class.

5. For homework, ask students to complete the Take-Home Activity Sheet by reviewing their summaries and choosing one or two words that describe Malcolm during this period in his life. The following are examples of possible student descriptions: afraid; angry; disappointed; lost; strung out; spiritual awakening; charismatic. Students will take these one-to-two-word descriptions and find at least three quotes from the book that support their descriptions. For example:

    Malcolm Little = shattered dreams
    "I was still not intelligent enough, in their eyes to become whatever I wanted to be. It was then that I began to change—inside. I drew away from white people." Chapter 2, "Mascot," page 37.

6. On the following day, reconfigure students into groups of four, making sure that each member of a group represents a different period in the life of Malcolm X. Have students share their activity sheets with their new group, including the one-to-two-word descriptions and quotes they recorded as homework.

7. After groups have shared their findings, have students write a short essay on their own, answering the following questions:
    - Discuss how Malcolm X's experiences as Malcolm Little, Detroit Red, Malcolm X, and el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz shaped his life.
    - How did each of these names symbolize different periods in his life?

- What did he learn from his experiences under each identity?
- What might we learn from his struggles?

Student essays should cite at least three quotes from the novel that represent different periods in Malcolm's life. Students can use the quotes they have found, as well as the quotes their group mates have used.

Adaptation

With younger or less advanced readers, hold a class discussion about the different names Malcolm X used during his life. Next to each name, ask the class to brainstorm adjectives that describe Malcolm X during that period in his life. Then brainstorm events that shaped him during that time. After this discussion, divide the class into four groups, assign each group a different name, and have each group select one quote from the book that reflects Malcolm X during that period. Have one member from each group read the quote aloud to the class.

Questions

1. Do you think Malcolm X considered himself a civil rights leader? Why or why not? Support your answer with evidence from the text of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.*
2. It has been said that Malcolm X both "inspired and petrified" the nation. Why do you think he was described that way?
3. Malcolm X's beliefs were shaped by the racial hatred of white supremacy. At the end of Malcolm's story, he goes through a change while on a pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca. How had his ideals transformed at this point in his life?
4. How do you think Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. changed American society? How might America be different if they hadn't been murdered?
5. Do you think one man can change society? Why do you think people who try to reform society have so often had their lives taken?
6. What do you think were the major influences that moved Malcolm X to become a leader?

Evaluation

You can evaluate your students' essays and group work using the following three-point rubric:

> Three points: student essay is thoughtful, clearly written, well-organized, and includes quotes and information that have been gathered collaboratively within the group; essay draws thoughtful conclusions; activity sheets have been completed and include a concise summary that answers all questions and provides relevant textual citations.
>
> Two points: student essay contains some pertinent quotes and makes valuable connections but is unable to grasp the "big picture" and does not include at least three textual citations or answer all of the summary questions.

One point: student essay contains few pertinent quotes and is unable to comment on different periods in Malcolm X's life; student was unable to work collaboratively with the group; activity sheets are incomplete.

Extensions

Comparing Civil Rights Leaders
Encourage students to research Martin Luther King and compare his life with the life of Malcolm X. What were King's religious beliefs? What were the influences on his inner and outer life? What were his views on violence, leadership, and African American civil rights? Have students use the details they have gathered to compare the lives of both men. How were they similar? Different? What are their legacies? Visit the following Web sites to find out more about Martin Luther King Jr.:

The Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project
http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/

Search for Martin Luther King Jr. at Biography.com
http://www.biography.com/cgi-bin/biomain.cgi

The Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Project
http://129.71.160.50:81/MLKjr/intro.htm

Photos of Martin Luther King Jr. from *Life* Magazine
http://www.lifemag.com/Life/mlk/mlkpics.html

Classic Quotes Time Line
Have students work together to create a time line on the class bulletin board. Explain that they will choose classic quotes by Malcolm X that illustrate important moments in his life. Each student should copy one favorite quote from his or her handout onto an index card (one per card). Then have students share their quotes and place them on the time line bulletin board.

Malcolm X Multimedia Presentation
Challenge students to put *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in historical context by creating a multimedia presentation. Their presentation should use images, sounds, and even videos to show race relations in America from the 1930s to the end of the 1960s. Encourage students to also include cultural details such as popular music, sports heroes, celebrities, and movie stars.

Muslim versus Nation of Islam
If possible, have students view the documentary that is discussed in the autobiography, *The Hate That Hate Produced*. Afterward, have students research the present-day status of the Nation of Islam. Then have them write and illustrate a pamphlet that explains the difference between the Nation of Islam and the orthodox Muslim belief system.

Suggested Readings:

Malcolm X: His life and Legacy
Kevin Brown, Millbrook Press, 1995.
An outstanding biography of the controversial African American, from the burning of his family home by the Ku Klux Klan when he was a child through his association and split with the Nation of Islam, to his assassination at the age of thirty-nine.

Alex Haley and Malcolm X's The Autobiography of Malcolm X
Harold Bloom, editor, Chelsea House, 1996.
This entry in the Bloom's Notes series includes a brief biography of both Malcolm X and Alex Haley, an examination of The Autobiography of Malcolm X's themes and structure, and excerpts of analytical essays by other writers.

Web Links:

philly.com-Black History
This part of the main web site for Philadelphia news services provides information on Malcolm X with links to other aspects of the civil rights movement.
http://www.philly.com/packages/history/people/malcolm/malcolm.asp

World Book
A World Book site accessed under "fun and learning," then "deep background" archives. Under the heading of "The African-American Journey," it provides links to civil rights leaders and the movement itself.
http://www.worldbook.com/index

Ballantine Teacher's Guide
An additional guide to the teaching of THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X; it presents another extensive lesson for the teaching of the work, followed by suggested readings.
http://www.randomhouse.com/BB/teachers/tgs/malcolmx.html

Malcolm X A Research Site
This web page is designed to be a resource for scholarship in Black Studies and the political development of activists in the
http://www.brothermalcolm.net

Vocabulary

civil rights
Definition: The nonpolitical rights of a citizen, especially the rights of personal liberty guaranteed to U.S. citizens by the Constitution.
Context: Martin Luther King Jr. led African Americans and their supporters in the civil rights movement in nonviolent protests for equal rights.

demagogue
Definition: A leader who makes use of popular prejudices and false claims and promises in order to gain power.
Context: A demagogue will manipulate people's emotions and fears in order to gain power.

Muslim
Definition: An adherent of Islam who believes in Allah as the sole deity and in Muhammad as his prophet.
Context: Followers of Islam believe that Muhammad is the prophet of the god Allah.

racism
Definition: A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.
Context: Malcolm X was first a victim of white supremacist racism when his childhood home was attacked and burned by the Ku Klux Klan.

separatist
Definition: An advocate of racial or cultural separation.
Context: Malcolm X held the separatist belief that whites and blacks should work apart in their own racial groups to learn about how to respect each other.

Academic standards

This program may be used to address the following academic standards, which are based on national standards put forth by NCTM, NCTE, NSTA, and many others.

Grade level:
12
Subject area:
Literature
Standard:
Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process.
Benchmark:
Understands influences on a reader's response to a text (e.g., personal values, perspectives, and experiences).
Benchmark:

Identifies and analyzes the philosophical assumptions and basic beliefs underlying an author's work.

Grade level:
12
Subject area:
Literature
Standard:
Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts.
Benchmark:
Uses discussions with peers as a way of understanding information.

All national academic standards used on this site are compiled and provided to Discovery Channel School by the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL) in Aurora, Colorado.

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Name: _____

Character Analysis, Part One

1. Which name are you analyzing?

2. How old was Malcolm when he used this name?

3. What important events happened in his life during this time?

4. Did he have any religious beliefs, and if so what were they?

5. What were his influences at this time?

6. What opinions did he have about violence?

7. Did he have any opinions on the African American identity or civil rights in the United States?

8. **Personality summary:** Describe the character of Malcolm X during this period in his life. Who was he? How did his experiences shape his life and the choices he made?

Name: _____

Character Analysis, Part Two

In class, you wrote a personality summary describing Malcolm X during a specific period in his life. Now, think of one or two words that best describe that period of Malcolm's life. Then support your description with at least three passages from the book, citing where you found each passage. For example:

Name/Description: Malcolm Little = shattered dreams
Passage #1: "I was still not intelligent enough, in their eyes to become whatever I wanted to be. It was then that I began to change - inside. I drew away from white people." Chapter Two; Mascot, page 37.

Name/Description:

Passage #1:

Passage #2:

Passage #3:

For extra credit, create a visual representation of Malcolm X, or draw any image to illustrate the words and quotes you chose.

Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
This documentary of the "angriest black man in America" uses interviews, photos, and archival footage to investigate the turbulent factors that shaped Malcolm X's life and opened his eyes to the reality of racism in America.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ⓟ

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
The Autobiography of Malcolm X

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What early African American literary form do critics often link *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* to in their effort to show its mark on America and the literary world?

2. What traumatic encounter in Malcolm Little's early education robbed him of his dream of becoming a lawyer?

3. How did Malcolm Little rebuild his life after a youth devoted to drug dealing and use, and what symbolic change denoted this turnaround?

4. What media event in 1959 made Malcolm X an instant national celebrity?

5. What was Malcolm X's relationship to the civil rights movement spearheaded by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?

6. What important change in Malcolm X's outlook occurred in March 1964 as a result of his hajj, the sacred pilgrimage he made to Mecca to affirm his Muslim faith?

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The Autobiography of Malcolm X

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What early African American literary form do critics often link *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* to in their effort to show its mark on America and the literary world?
Critics believe that Malcolm X's *Autobiography* can be linked to slave narratives, a "primary way African Americans have foisted their consciousness" on this country.

2. What traumatic encounter in Malcolm Little's early education robbed him of his dream of becoming a lawyer?
A cruel teacher told the academically talented student that he should "be more realistic" about the opportunities open to him as an African American and dissuaded him from pursuing high goals.

3. How did Malcolm Little rebuild his life after a youth devoted to drug dealing and use, and what symbolic change denoted this turnaround?
Malcolm Little rebuilt his life in prison by reading and discovering spiritual inspiration in the teachings of the Nation of Islam. He changed his name to Malcolm X to signal the transformation he'd undergone in prison.

4. What media event in 1959 made Malcolm X an instant national celebrity?
The event that catapulted Malcolm X onto the national stage was his television debut as the focus of Mike Wallace's documentary "The Hate That Hate Produced."

5. What was Malcolm X's relationship to the civil rights movement spearheaded by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?
Malcolm X was not a part of the civil rights movement. He strongly opposed Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolent protest.

6. What important change in Malcolm X's outlook occurred in March 1964 as a result of his hajj, the sacred pilgrimage he made to Mecca to affirm his Muslim faith?

As a result of his journey to Mecca, Malcolm X renounced his unconditional hatred of all white people, stating his belief that white people *could* help in fighting the battle for racial justice.

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